

“Oscar Wilde Delighted,” [New York] *Star* (New York, NY), 11 Jan. [1882]¹

VIEWS OF HIS AUDIENCE AND THE RECEPTION THEY GAVE HIM.

His Peculiar Dress in Entire Consonance With His Idea of the Most Beautiful—His Programme Mapped Out for the Future.

When THE STAR reporter dropped into Sarony’s yesterday to have a few hundred imperial cartes struck off, he noticed that an aesthetic atmosphere pervaded the place, and the ladies were all on the tiptoe of excitement and expectation.² A few of them said “Here he is,” when THE STAR reporter entered, but when he took off his hat an air of disappointment stole over their too too faces. They were waiting to see Oscar Wilde, the aesthete, and when, in a few minutes afterward, he entered arrayed in all the glory of his low-cut vest, knee breeches, silk stockings and pumps of ye olden time, they were in a flutter of excitement. The lion of the day had come to have his noble figure committed to paper, so that he can flutter in every aesthetic album of the land. He makes an excellent picture, and will sell far quicker than the proverbial hot-cakes, if such a base and everyday comparison may be allowed. The outlines of his limbs do not show as well as they might, owing to the sombre hue of their classic surroundings. When he glided away from the operating room of the photographer he shook his head to get a stray lock or two in order, and gently touched THE STAR reporter’s hand with two fingers.

DELIGHTED WITH HIS RECEPTION.

“What are your impressions of your reception by the American people?” was asked.

“Beautiful—perfectly beautiful,” he replied. “I am truly delighted to find so many cultured and refined people in this land. I have been gratified, indeed, with the reception which I received at my first lecture.”

“Your costume was somewhat of a surprise to your audience, Mr. Wilde,” remarked THE STAR man, gazing nervously at the knee-breeches.

1. Included in Colonel Morse’s scrapbook from Oscar Wilde’s tour of America (British Library, Add MS 81822, f. 31–2).

2. Napoleon Sarony’s photographic studio at 37 Union Square, New York. Wilde was first photographed by Sarony on 5 January, but may have returned to collect prints or to be photographed again: Cooper, J. (2019). ‘A picturesque subject indeed!’ The Sarony photographs of Oscar Wilde. *The Wildean*, 55, 3–33, 8.

"Ah, indeed. Well, perhaps so; but then of course it may have been unexpected by them. But it is only my usual evening dress, and the one in which I attend dinners and receptions at my friends' houses."

"Why do you adopt such a style of dress? It is not entirely in accord with the prevailing customs."

"Perhaps not; but then you know it is entirely in consonance with my idea of the most beautiful. There should be beauty and taste in dress as well as in all things." Here the gentle Oscar was wafted away to the Oriental realms of a Fifth avenue mansion to partake of a light and airy repast.

WHY THE PEOPLE GOT TIRED

A friend of the aesthete was next seen, and talked freely over the way in which Oscar feels over his reception.¹ "It was a grand success," said he, "and fully 300 of our best citizens had to be refused admission."²

"How about the laughter that greeted him at first?"

"Well, he expected that, and was not discomposd by it in the least, but the moment he opened his mouth they were all attention."

"But it is said many got weary and left before he finished?"

"Yes; you see there were over 300 people standing, and the lecture lasted one hour and forty minutes. Many of them could not hear him; and, besides, became very tired standing."

"Why did he talk so long?"

"Bless me, but it is most extraordinary. He was totally oblivious of time when he was speaking. When told, after the lecture, that he had been speaking for nearly two hours, he remarked: 'It seemed to me scarcely fifteen minutes; how extraordinary, to be sure.' Invitations from all quarters are coming to him, and blue-blooded leaders of society are already commencing to fight over himself and his knee-breeches. He has been compelled to decline many of them already."

OSCAR'S ROUTE AHEAD

To-day he will dine with Sam Ward and a number of other distinguished gentlemen of aesthetic tendencies.³

On Thursday he will admire, in his own peculiar way, Clara Morris at the matinee in the Union Square Theatre.¹ On Friday evening he will be tendered a reception at the

1. The "friend" may be Henry (or Harry) Hewitt. See Hall-Haynes, "Art's Apostle," *The Sunday Herald* (Boston, MA), 15 Jan. 1882, 8, repr. *The Complete Interviews*, 696-9, 699; and "Wilde's Experience," *The Topeka Daily Capital* (Topeka, KS), 23 Jan. 1882, 3, repr. *The Complete Interviews*, 760-2.

2. That is, to Chickering Hall, where Wilde gave his first lecture on 9 January.

3. See *The Complete Interviews*, 85, note 1.

residence of Mrs. Fortescue, when the elite will again have the pleasure of looking on his locks and pumps.² On Saturday he dines with William H. Hurlburt and a select company of similar aesthetes. Tearing himself away from their company, he will start by special train on Saturday night for Philadelphia with Mr. Lippincott of the Saturday Night Club. He will lecture in the City of Brotherly Love on Tuesday,³ and will then go to Baltimore and show himself at the Forbes lecture.⁴ On the 20th he goes to Washington, and will lecture there also.

Then he will steer for the centre of the universe, Boston, where a tremendous ovation awaits him. He will there go into the aesthetic whirl of Hub society and will lecture there on the 30th inst.⁵ His movements after that are uncertain, as it is probable that the Boston people will never consent to his departure from among them.

Mr. R. d'Oyly [*sic*] Carte, manager for Mr. Wilde, arrived last night on the steamer *Servia* from Liverpool.⁶

1. Morris was appearing in *The New Magdalen*. Wilde attended the matinee on Thursday 12 January. See [Augustus R. Cazauran], "Is it Aesthetic Taffy?" *The New York Herald* (New York, NY), 13 Jan. 1882, 10, repr. *The Complete Interviews*, 67–8.

2. Marion "Minnie" T. Fortescue (1848–1902) was a writer. For her reception for Wilde see Sturgis, 209–10/202.

3. That is, Tuesday 17 January.

4. Wilde did not attend Forbes' lecture in Baltimore, remaining on the train as it passed through the city, alighting instead at Washington DC.

5. Wilde lectured in Boston on 31 January.

6. According to "D'Oyly Carte and His Plans," *New York Tribune* (New York, NY), 12 Jan. 1882, 8, repr. *The Complete Interviews*, 755–6, 755, the *Servia* arrived on the afternoon of 11 January. See also "Passengers Arrived," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), 12 Jan. 1882, 10.